



U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr., Chairman

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News Advisory

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House Approves Children's Safety Legislation

Measure Better Tracks Sex Offenders, Stiffens Penalties for Non-Registration

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The House today by voice vote approved legislation aimed at protecting children by better tracking convicted sex offenders and stiffening penalties for non-registration by sex offenders. H.R. 4472, introduced by House Judiciary Committee Chairman F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr. (R-Wis.), now moves to the Senate for consideration. Chairman Sensenbrenner delivered the following remarks during today's House debate.

"Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 4472, the "Children's Safety and Violent Crime Reduction Act." This legislation contains bipartisan, comprehensive proposals to better protect our children from convicted sex offenders, to enhance judicial security, and to combat violent criminal gangs that terrorize our communities. Last year, the full House overwhelmingly approved three separate bills tailored to address these critical issues.

"H.R. 3132, the "Children's Safety Act of 2005" passed the House on September 14, 2005, by a vote of 371-52. H.R. 1751, the "Secure Access to Justice and Courthouse Protection Act of 2005," was approved by the House on November 9, 2005 by a vote of 375-45; and H.R. 1279, the "Gang Prevention and Deterrence Act" passed the House on May 11, 2005, by a vote of 279-144. H.R. 4472 incorporates core provisions of each bill, with some modifications and additions.

"Last year, our nation was horrified by news of the sexual assault and kidnapping of Dylan and Shasta Groehne, and the brutal murder of their parents and siblings. These heinous acts occurred after 9-year old Jessica Lunsford was abducted, raped, and buried alive, and 13-year old Sarah Lunde was murdered. All of these terrible crimes were committed by convicted sex offenders. While these tragedies received the public attention and outrage they demanded, sexual predators continue to exploit current loopholes in our criminal justice system to prey on America's most vulnerable. H.R. 4472 protects America's children by making it much harder for them to do so.

“When child sex offenders are brought to justice and serve time for their offenses, they are often released into unsuspecting communities to resume their sexual attacks. There are over 550,000 sex offenders in the country, and it is conservatively estimated that at least *100,000* of them are “lost” in the system, meaning that non-registered sex offenders are living in our communities, attending schools and working at locations where they can prey on our children. The threat to our children grows each day as more unregistered sex offenders move freely within our midst. H.R. 4472 reduces these unconscionable vulnerabilities by strengthening sex offender notification requirements.

“H.R. 4472 also addresses the problem of violence in and around our courthouses -- against judges, prosecutors, witnesses, law enforcement and other court personnel, as well as their immediate families. According to the Administrative Office of U.S. Courts, Federal judges receive nearly 700 threats a year, and several Federal judges require security personnel to protect them and their families from violent gangs, drug organizations and disgruntled litigants. Judges, witnesses, courthouse personnel and law enforcement officers must operate without fear in order to enforce and administer the law without bias.

“Finally, H.R. 4472 includes relevant provisions to address the growing national threat from violent and vicious gangs in our communities. According to the last National Youth Gang Survey, it is estimated that there are now between 750,000 and 850,000 gang members in our country. Every city in the country with a population of 250,000 or more has reported gang activity. There are over 25,000 gangs in more than 3,000 jurisdictions in the United States. In recent years, gangs have become organized criminal syndicates with structured associations, many of which are now international in scope. State and local law enforcement have sent us a clear message – update and strengthen America’s laws to combat the scourge of violence in our communities.

“H.R. 4472 is strongly supported by John Walsh of *America’s Most Wanted*, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, and other victims and representatives of victims organizations, as well as law enforcement organizations around the country.

“These tireless advocates for America’s children have provided vital assistance in crafting this measure, and their calls for justice for America’s children must no longer go unanswered. We must act now to ensure that the tragedy of pervasive sexual assaults on America’s children is not compounded by the tragedy of congressional inaction to strengthen our laws to address this national epidemic.

“I urge my colleagues to put aside partisan differences and speak in a clear and united voice to protect our children, to ensure a safe judiciary and criminal justice system, and to give America’s law-abiding citizens the right to live free from gang violence.”

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